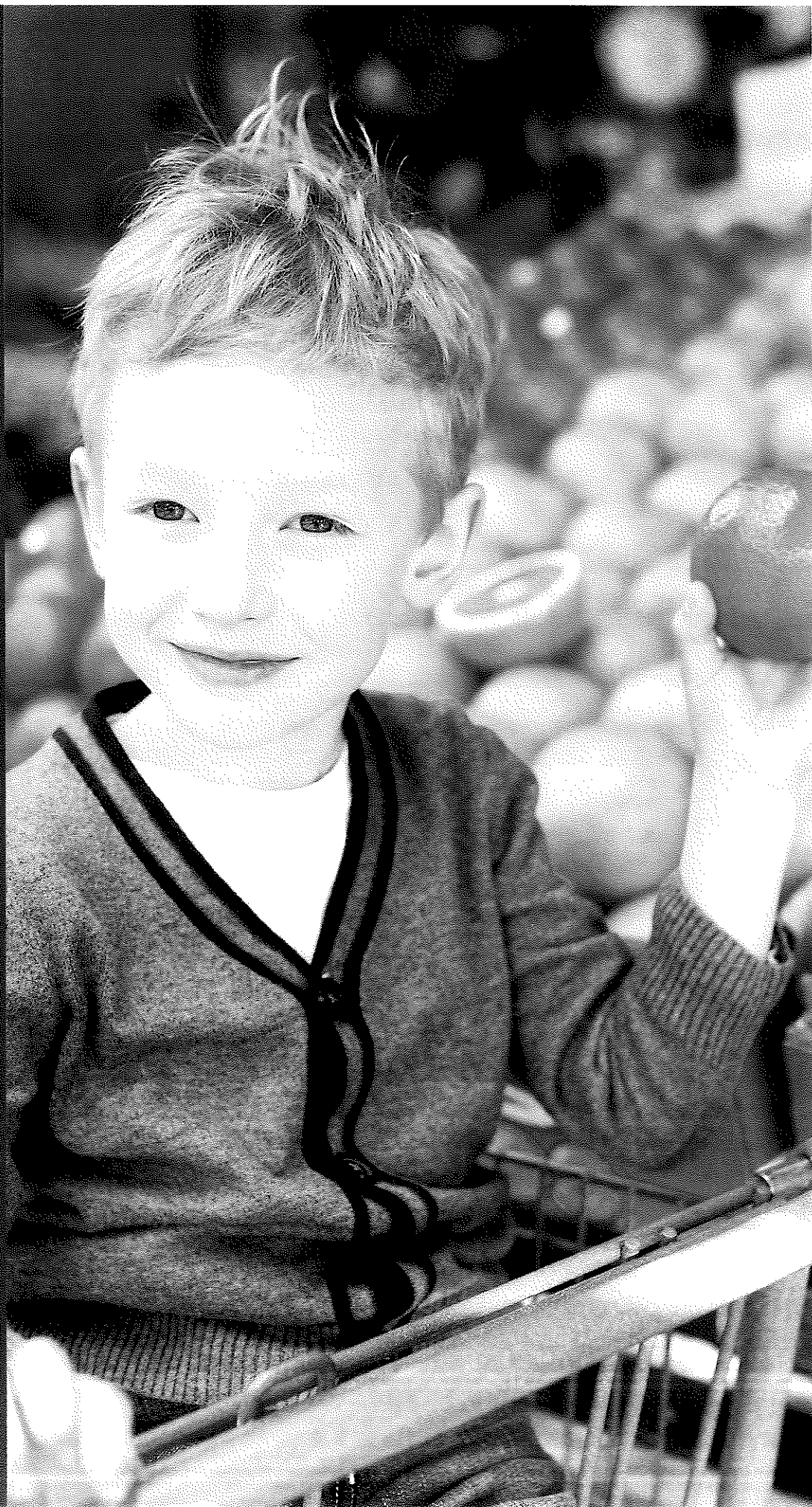




Department of
Health

REMOTE WIC 2022 REPORT

Division of
Family
Health and
Wellness



About WIC

What is WIC?

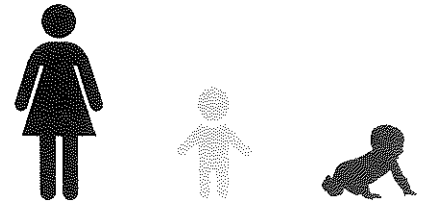
The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program aims to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk. This is achieved by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health and social services. WIC is one of the most successful and cost-effective federally funded programs directed toward improving the health of its participants. The benefits of in-person WIC services have been recorded for decades, while the impact of remote services on maternal and child health outcomes is still being studied.

Health benefits of WIC

- Improved birth outcomes
- Lower infant mortality
- Better child cognitive development
- Healthier food choices and improved diets

Benefits include more than food

WIC benefits are not limited only to food. Participants have access to a number of resources, including health screening, nutrition and breastfeeding counseling, immunization and substance abuse referrals, and more. In-person WIC visits also allow staff to act on signs of additional needs like shelter or child welfare concerns.



27,897

17,847

31,402

Average Monthly Participation,
2021

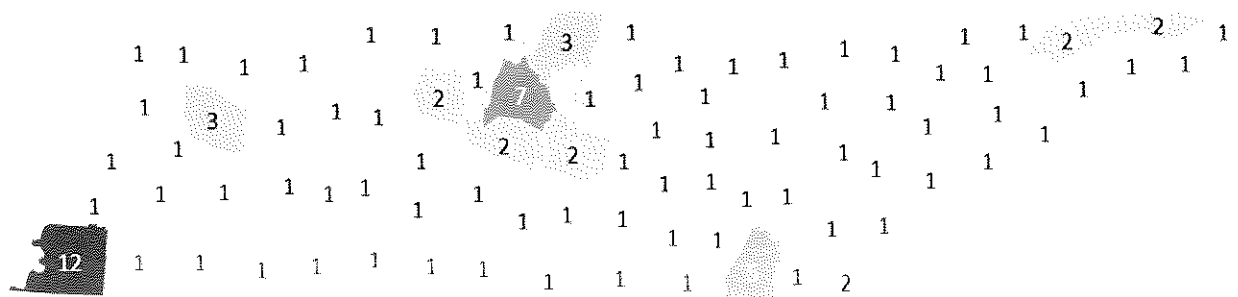


In 2021, **\$83 million** in food benefit purchases were made at TN vendors.



Over **50%** of infants born in Tennessee participate in WIC.

There are 126 WIC Clinics Across the State

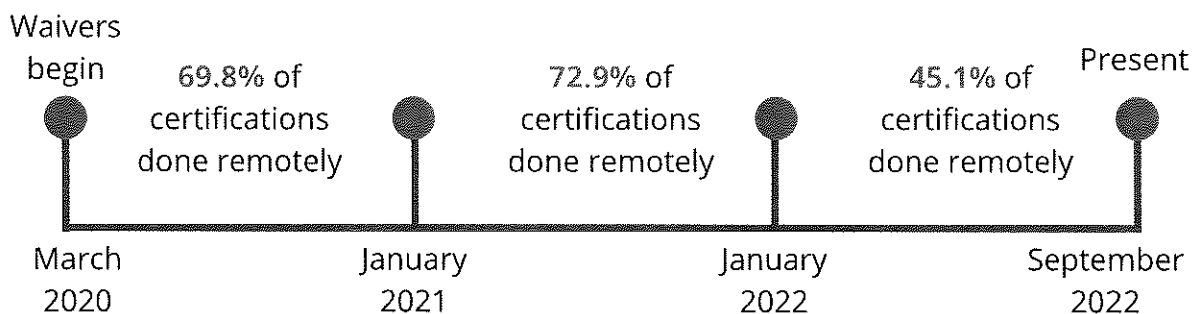


Introduction to WIC Physical Presence Waivers

Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 (FFCRA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture granted programmatic waivers to WIC State agencies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The FFCRA Physical Presence waiver allows WIC local agencies and clinic sites to provide certification appointments remotely and includes the ability to defer anthropometric and bloodwork requirements necessary to determine nutritional risk.

The FFCRA Physical Presence waiver was granted in March 2020, and 93% of Tennessee WIC local agencies began utilizing the waivers that month. By April 2020, 100% of Tennessee WIC local agencies were utilizing the waivers.

Remote WIC certifications are completed over the phone. The most common methods for local agencies to collect certification documents from participants remotely are fax (100%), email (100%), verification systems (79%), in-person drop-offs (71%), and text message (71%).



Best Practices

Provide Options

WIC participants have different needs and capacities that require different solutions. A best practice is to meet participants where they are and provide a variety of remote service options to fit their varying needs.

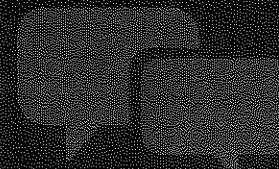
Eliminate Barriers

Many of the best practices for providing remote WIC services involve eliminating barriers to services. For Tennesseans who struggle with reliable internet access, providing breastfeeding support over text on state-issued cell phones has been identified as a best practice. An added benefit of providing breastfeeding support over text is participants can look back at the messages to recall information shared with them. For participants who wish to receive their breastfeeding support via video conferencing, Zoom has been identified as the best program to use since most participants are familiar with it, and it does not require participants to create an account. With the addition of remote WIC services, it was determined participants could attend virtual breastfeeding classes and support groups hosted by clinics beyond the one they participate at, which allows for better accommodation of participants' schedules.

Social Media

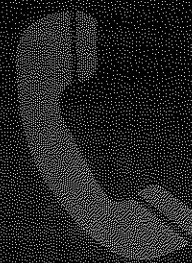
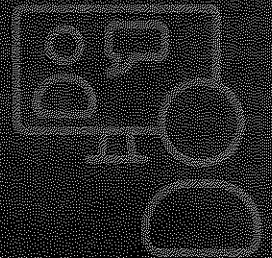
Social media has been identified as a best practice for promoting virtual events and sharing programmatic updates. Statewide and county-level Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts are used to engage with participants.

Remote WIC Services



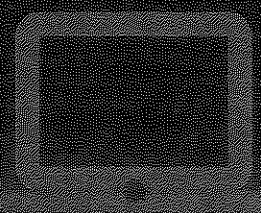
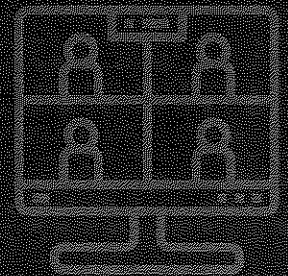
Breastfeeding
Support Via
Text

Individual
Breastfeeding
Support Via
Video
Conferencing



Certifications,
Nutrition
Education, and
Breastfeeding
Support Via
Telephone

Group Classes
and Support
Groups Via
Video
Conferencing



Nutrition
Education Via
Wichealth.org

There are
2132 active
WICHealth.org
accounts and
over **2000**
lessons
completed
every month.

Resources

Wichealth.org

Wichealth.org is an online nutrition education resource available to WIC participants. Nutrition lesson modules are available in English and Spanish and cover topics including choosing healthy foods, meal planning, developmental milestones, and other tips for living a healthy lifestyle. Wichealth.org also has a collection of recipes that include WIC foods to help participants utilize the foods available to them through WIC. Participants can take wichealth.org lessons of their choice to fulfill their nutrition education. Wichealth.org can be accessed on a computer, tablet, smartphone, or through the WIC Shopper app.

Tennessee Women Infants and Children Website

The Tennessee Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program website provides programmatic updates and resources for WIC participants.

Website resources include

- WIC-approved food lists
- Updated cash value benefits amounts
- Clinics' contact information
- Healthy recipes
- Designated breastfeeding expert contact list
- Item recall information
- UPC submission request form
- Links to additional resources for breastfeeding support and nutrition education

9:00

TN

Section

Try New Recipes

Don't know what to do with those WIC foods? Making delicious meals that your family will love are easy and simple with WIC! Below are a few recipes to try using your WIC benefits.

Videos



Communication

WIC Shopper App

The WIC Shopper app was implemented in March 2021 to improve the WIC client shopping experience and accessibility of benefits information. The app helps WIC participants identify items they can purchase with their prescribed WIC benefits. WIC participants can scan the UPC barcode of store products to determine whether that product is allowable as a WIC food item and on the participant's WIC benefits. Additional key features include benefit balance, submitting product requests, location of Health Department clinics and WIC-authorized store locations, healthy recipes, and cooking and shopping tips. If the participant allows notifications, they will receive reminders for appointments, benefit periods, and other notices from their WIC clinic. The app has also been used to communicate item recalls and cash value benefit increases. The app is free and can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store.

Text Messaging

Tennessee WIC regions and metros use text messaging services to communicate with participants.

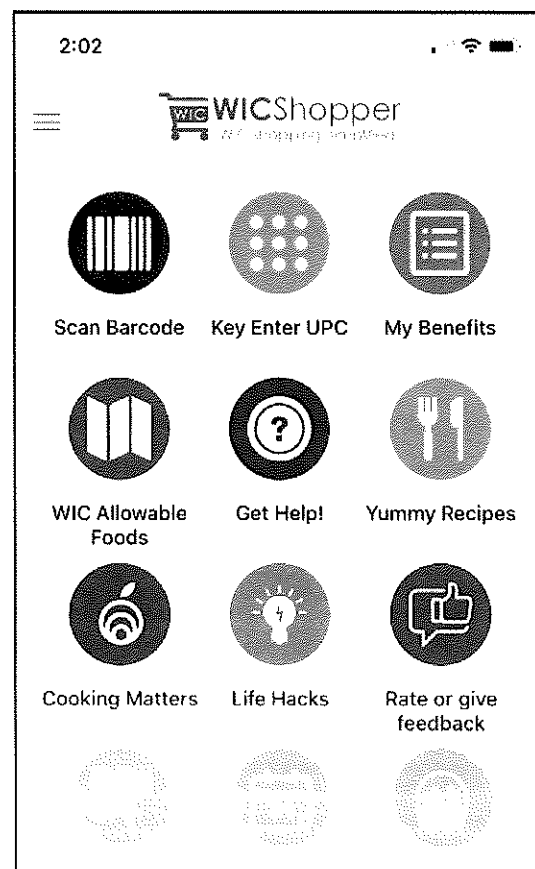
Text messages have been used to communicate

- Farmers Market Nutrition Program dates and locations
- Reminders to use benefits
- Reminders to make an appointment
- Recipes from the WIC Shopper app
- Ideas on how to use less redeemed items
- Item recalls

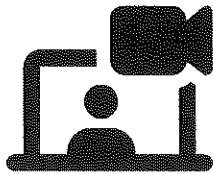
Text messaging services have proved to be an effective tool to engage with WIC clients outside the clinics. An increase in calls to make an appointment has been observed following reminder messages.

WIC Shopper App at a Glance

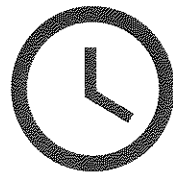
- Over **90,000** families registered
- **268,988** products scanned on average each month
- Over **1,700** products requested



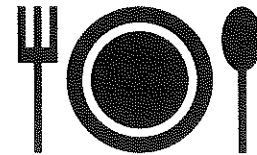
The Impact of Physical Presence Waivers on WIC Services



100% of TN WIC local agencies found the waiver made WIC more accessible

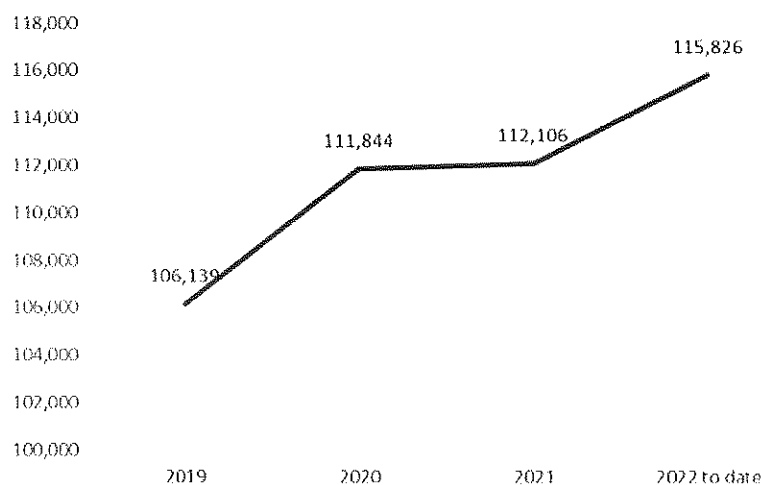


79% of TN WIC local agencies found the waiver allowed WIC to serve more participants in less time



86% of TN WIC local agencies found the waiver improved access to food for participants

Participation



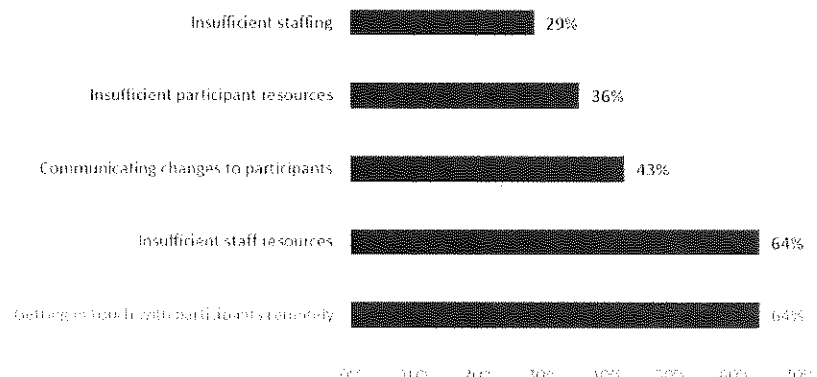
Data Note: 2022 data includes January 2022 - September 2022

Participation increased during the use of remote WIC services.

64%

of Tennessee WIC local agencies found conducting remote certifications to be slightly challenging.

Top Challenges Identified



Tennessee WIC's Telehealth Program Pilot

- decreases participant wait times
- decreases staff travel time
- increases productivity
- increases participant access to same-day services
- assists clinics with staff shortages
- assists clinics who are backed up with clients



WIC After Waivers

When the WIC physical presence waivers expire, which is set for April 11, 2023, WIC participants will be required to return to the clinic for certifications, anthropometric measurements, and bloodwork. Remote options for nutrition education and breastfeeding support will remain available to participants. Resources and communication methods utilized during the use of remote WIC services will continue to be offered and updated as needed.

Tennessee WIC will also continue a telehealth program it is currently piloting. The telehealth program allows WIC nutrition staff to see participants located at other clinics virtually. The telehealth program addresses three needs: assist local clinics having staff shortages without staff having to leave their county, increase participant access to same-day services, and increase productivity. Nutrition staff from clinics across the region are added to a Microsoft Teams contact group. When a clinic has a participant who requires nutrition education, but there is no nutrition staff available in that clinic, they will alert the Microsoft Teams contact group of the request. The first available nutrition staff from the contact group will then complete the nutrition education session virtually over Microsoft Teams with the participant. The average clinic-provider response rate is 3.87 minutes. Participants who have utilized the telehealth program report lower wait times compared to traditional nutrition education. The program has been beneficial to the staff as it cuts down on travel time, assists clinics with staff shortages, and assists clinics that are backed up with participants.

References

Insight Policy Research. (2021). (rep.). WIC Local Agency FFCRA Physical Presence Waiver Use Report (pp. 1–5). Arlington, VA.